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DE RUEHBUL #3721/01 3230457
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 190457Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3300
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 003721

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS USAID FOR ASIA/SCAA
USFOR-A FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: EAGR EAID PGOV AF

SUBJECT: AGRICULTURE IN PANJSHIR: FERTILE GROUND FOR U.S. PROGRAMS

¶1. (U) Summary: Small family farming is the staple of Panjshir Province's economy, making it a high priority for the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), as well as for Governor Bahlol Bahji, who declared 2009 to be the &Year of Agriculture in Panjshir.⁸ Local farmers make good use of the valley's limited arable land, but lack modern techniques and equipment, quality seeds and fertilizer, and the resources to convert wheat and corn fields to higher-value orchards. PRT activities aim to address these deficiencies, and to increase jobs and income in a manner that builds trust in Afghan institutions. Further development of Panjshir's agricultural sector will demonstrate what is possible when Afghans take firm responsibility for their own security. End summary.

Expanding Jobs and Income through Increased Yields

¶2. (U) The economy of Panjshir province rests almost entirely on small family farms. Family farmers make good use of the arable land wedged between the arid mountains of the Hindu Kush, growing mainly wheat and corn but also potatoes, apples and mulberries, as well as some oil seed, walnuts, cherries, alfalfa and clover. Livestock and poultry are also important. Long renowned for its mulberries, Panjshir lost many of its orchards during the anti-Soviet resistance, when irrigation canals were destroyed. Scavenging for fuel has also led to deforestation. Today, most of Panjshir's farmers continue to work small plots of land, seeding by hand and using the same oxen-driven plows as previous generations.

¶3. (U) Agriculture is a high priority for PRT Panjshir. Programs are led by Panjshir's USDA representative together with RC-East's Agricultural Development Team (ADT), with support from USAID and PRT Civil Affairs. Our main objective, consistent with the overall U.S. Assistance Strategy for Afghanistan, is to expand jobs and income through increased yields, linkages between farmers and markets, irrigation, and conversion to higher-value crops. Some of the PRT's most successful projects are those focused on women. All activities are closely aligned with the PRT's governance goals, ensuring that U.S. assistance leads not only to provincial development but also increases Afghans' confidence in their own government.

New Crops

¶4. (U) The PRT has been working since 2008 to assist interested farmers in converting their wheat and corn fields to higher income fruit orchards, especially apple, apricot, almond, cherry and walnut. In separate projects over the last two years, the PRT has supported the planting of more than 100,000 fruit and nut trees in dozens of villages across the valley. In addition, the PRT has helped establish thirty

different woodlots with 150,000 fast-growing poplar and willow trees, for fuel and construction. Most recently, the PRT funded training for 25 women in the planting, production and marketing of high-value saffron. Other potential new crops such as soybeans, red beans and sorghum are being tested through the PRT's experimental farm.

15. (U) Analysis by the USDA in 2008 revealed that wheat yields in Panjshir are far less than their potential. Wheat stocks throughout the valley are typically re-used, becoming old and mixed with weeds and rye, and have little resistance to pests and disease. Fields are over-watered by farmers using flood-irrigation. To address these problems, the PRT has established a demonstration farm, and is conducting winter wheat trials to demonstrate the benefits of improved water management, seed varieties, and fertilizer placement. Earlier this year, USAID funded the distribution of 14,000 bags of fertilizer to Panjshiri farmers at far-below-market cost through private sector dealers. In October and November, more than 8,000 additional farmers received winter wheat seed and fertilizer through the same USAID program. Unfortunately, the PRT has not yet had the resources to undertake significant irrigation projects in the valley, though the impact could be significant given the scarcity of arable land (arable land in Afghanistan being defined as land under irrigation).

Agribusiness

16. (U) PRT-funded road improvements throughout the valley have improved the infrastructure for local farmers to move

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their goods to market. Agribusiness is growing slowly. The PRT, with a combination of the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) and USAID funding, has provided training to 100 women in six districts in the production and preservation of jams, juices and jellies, along with marketing and basic literacy skills. In addition, the PRT has provided more than 1,000 farmers with bee boxes for honey production. These programs have been enormously popular, and the products are reaching the shelves of Panjshir's conex shops. Cooperatives are also springing up for the first time in connection with U.S. seed and fertilizer programs, and cool storage facilities.

Governance

17. (U) The PRT aligns its agriculture programs with support for good governance and Afghan ownership. Governor Bahlol has been a strong supporter of farmers in the province, declaring 2009 to be the &Year of Agriculture in Panjshir.⁸ At the Governor's behest, a large portion of Panjshir's 2008 Good Performance Initiative (GPI) funds from State/INL were spent on tractors, threshers, greenhouses, orchards and canals. USDA representative works hand-in-glove with Line Director Hashatullah Enayat, an energetic non-Panjshiri who receives solid support from the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Land's Horticulture and Livestock Program (HLP). USDA Rep is mentoring Enayat to turn first to his ministry rather than the PRT, and to coordinate more effectively with his fellow Line Directors to prepare decisions by the Provincial Development Council.

Other Partners

18. (U) Panjshir does not attract the same level of donor attention as other, more troubled, provinces. However, both Japan and France have made significant contributions to agriculture in the valley. Japan initiated Panjshir's first women's poultry project in 2008, providing chickens, chicken coops, and training to 600 women in three districts. Japan has also provided horticulture training and saplings to some

300 farmers. France, for its part, contributed 41 metric tons of improved winter wheat seed last year, and now has plans for a fish farm. French distribution of free wheat seed in some areas, however, threatens to undermine private sector seed dealers who say they may stop stocking wheat seed in the future if there are more large-scale give-always of seed to their regular customers. One significant U.S.-funded NGO program is the Dutch Committee for Afghanistan's establishment of privately-owned veterinary field units in each of Panjshir's districts, currently operating on a fee-for-service basis.

¶ 9. (U) Comment: The &Year of Agriculture in Panjshir8 has witnessed continued modest development of agriculture in the valley, with support from the U.S. and other international donors. In a province where insurgent activity is negligible, U.S. assistance in this sector is not a means of separating insurgents from the general population, but instead showcases what is possible when Afghans take responsibility for their own security. Continued U.S. assistance on agriculture is important for economic development in the valley, U.S. partnership with the people of Panjshir, and strengthening local trust in Afghan institutions. End Comment.

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